

Police: North businessman shot wife dead before torching house

BY RICK FOSTER / SUN CHRONICLE STAFF | Posted: Friday, April 11, 2008 12:00 am

CUMBERLAND, RI - The charred bodies of a man and woman found inside a home wracked by explosions and fire were identified today as a North Attleboro businessman and his wife - the apparent victims of a murder-suicide.

Investigators officially identified the dead couple as Norman Langelier, 61, and his wife Beatrice, 60, both of 500 Nate Whipple Highway.

Norman Langelier was the president of Barber Electric Manufacturing in North Attleboro.

Cumberland Police Chief John Desmarais said state medical examiners ruled that Beatrice Langelier died of a gunshot wound to the head - apparently shot before her husband ignited cylinders containing flammable propane gas placed throughout the house.

Desmarais said Norman Langelier, who was listed as a suicide, appeared to have died as a result of the blast.

A note left along with a propane tank inside a pickup truck found in the driveway of the home warned firefighters not to attempt to enter the home because of explosives, ammunition and gunpowder stored inside.

Desmarais and Mayor Daniel McKee addressed reporters outside police headquarters this afternoon and said residents were deeply saddened by the deaths.

The killing, in a rural section in northern Cumberland, was the town's first homicide in 15 years.

"Our hearts go out to each and every member of the families that are involved in this tragedy," said McKee, who added he had spoken with members of the woman's family.

The Langeliers had been married about 40 years.

Investigators picked through the charred rubble of the home, said to cover more than 3,000 square feet, for clues to how and why the deaths occurred.

Desmarais said 40 guns were taken from the burned building. All apparently belonged to Langelier.



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The remains of a Cumberland, R.I., house owned by Norman Langelier and his wife Beatrice. Langelier was the president of Barber Electric Manufacturing in North Attleboro. Police say Langelier shot his wife in the head before exploding the home with propane and gunpowder. (staff photo by Mike George)

The chief said detectives are still investigating whether there had been friction between the Langeliers, or whether business or medical woes might have prompted the murder-suicide.

He said it has not been established precisely how Langelier set off the mammoth explosion and fire that quickly consumed the yellow farmhouse before dawn on Thursday morning.

Neighbors summoned firefighters about 4:30 a.m., when they were awakened by an explosion. Firefighters were greeted with a second large explosion when they arrived at the burning home.

Desmarais, who was unwilling to describe the weapons found in the house, said it has not been established what type of gun was used to kill the woman.

Norman Langelier's death was "consistent with an explosion," the chief said.

From evidence at the scene, Desmarais said it appeared the explosion and fire had been "well planned" and that gas containers were scattered throughout the dwelling.

In another bizarre twist, police evacuated employees from the Barber Electric building at 30 Chestnut St. in North Attleboro on Thursday, after being notified by Cumberland law enforcement about the fire and circumstances around it in their town.

North Attleboro Detective Lt. David Dawes said the employees were evacuated for about two hours as a precaution until the state police bomb squad checked the building and determined it was safe.

Employees at the business declined to comment today about the fire or the deaths of Langelier and his wife.

Although Barber Electric is a long-established presence in North Attleboro, the business community said Langelier was not active or well known in local business networks.